

COPY OF MEMORANDUM GIVEN TO THE MINISTER,
SRI JAIPAL REDDY - II

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NODAL COMMITTEE SUPPORT STATEMENT

SUPPORT REQUEST

1. CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

1. Change from 3 yr. to 2 yr. course is a mess
2. Apr 14 96 Students go on strike demanding 3 yr. course
3. Apr 21 96 Syllabus Review Committee formed by AC
4. Jul 18 96 Committee formulates Revised Syllabus
5. Sep 18 96 AC meets
Holds that the Revised Syllabus needs to be whetted by outside experts for infrastructure and scheduling
Recommends zero semester
Recommends that meantime Pre-96 syllabus for next batch (to be admitted in Aug 97).
6. Oct 12 96 GC meets
Rejects AC recommendations
Holds that the inputs of Revised syllabus be incorporated in the 2 yr. structure
7. Oct 23 96 Students go on indefinite hunger strike
Demand implementation of AC recommendations
8. Oct 30 96 Minister intervenes and upholds the implementation of the AC recommendations
9. Nov 96 GC meets to uphold AC recommendations
10. Dec 96 AC meets
Decides to admit next batch from Aug 97 with pre-96 syllabus
Constitutes the outside experts committee
11. Nov 9 97 GC meets
Dr. Agashe asks time to work out 'conceptual plans'
12. Dec 17 97 AC meets
Faculty asks for time on the Revised Syllabus
Dr. Agashe tables 'conceptual plans'.
Issue of zero semester to be decided on 31 Dec.
13. Dec 20 97 Students go on indefinite strike demanding implementation of the Revised Syllabus.

2. REVIEW COMMITTEE (Revised Syllabus Committee)

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Shammi Nanda

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- Faculty
- Student

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3. BACKGROUND TO THE ISSUE

GENESIS OF THE REVISED SYLLABUS

The course structure has been changed 7 times in the past 11 years. This is unheard of in any academic institution. The last such change was made in 1996 when the 3 yr. courses were slashed to two years during the tenure of John Shankaramangalam (The faculty of FTII had drafted this 2 yr. syllabus within a matter of 15 days).

Following a strike a review committee was set up by the AC consisting of experts in various fields (ex-students), a representative from the faculty and a representative from the students. This was done for each area of specialization. The committee worked over a period of 4 months and finalised a document which was the Revised Syllabus.

This was tabled at the following AC. The AC decided that it must be whetted by outside experts (not graduates of FTII) and in the meantime after a zero semester the next batch be admitted with the pre-96 syllabus (this batch was admitted in Aug 97).

In the following GC all the AC recommendations were rejected. Following a hunger strike the then minister of I & B, Mr. C M Ibrahim intervened and directed that the GC accept all AC recommendations. In the next AC a committee of outside experts was formed and to this date no further work has been done on the Revised Syllabus.

Consequently the students demanded that an AC meeting be convened at the earliest to implement the syllabus for the coming batch (Aug 98), the prospectus for which would have to be out by January 1998 at the latest. Moreover the term of this AC was due to expire in December 97. After much pressure the AC meeting was declared to be on the 17th of December 1997.

CONTENTS OF THE REVISED SYLLABUS

While drafting the syllabus the members kept in mind the following:

1. Components that had become obsolete were to be dropped.
2. Additional focus was put on visiting faculty and a workshop oriented structure.
3. New inputs were added keeping with the contemporary developments in the video and digital field.
4. Inputs which had over the years been diluted or deleted (even though the infrastructure then was much less as compared to now) were restored.

A week by week breakdown was worked out for all the years and all the specialisations, including the co-ordination of all the departments for inter-departmental excercises. The Revised Syllabus was also drafted bearing in mind the existing infrastructure of the institute.

GENESIS OF DR. AGASHE'S PLANS

On his assuming office Dr. Agashe spent a few months traveling to various film schools in the world:- FEMIS (France), Berlin Film School and a film school in Australia. Four months after his having assumed office, he came up with a host of tentative interlinked proposals

which were called by him his 'conceptual proposals' which were to 'radically restructure academics and administration in FTII.'

CONTENTS OF DR. AGASHE'S PLANS

Some of the plans he proposed were:

Eighty students were to be admitted to the common integrated course, at the end of which 40 would be asked to leave with a certification that they were competent enough to be assistants in the industry. The other 40 would be allowed to continue specialising in a discipline decided by the faculty.

Short term courses would be introduced in all disciplines. This was based on the observation that any number of such courses with dubious credentials are running in the country, and that the institute had come into competition with such set-ups.

A specialisation in videography would be introduced.

To alleviate the financial pressures on the institute the students would shoot all excersises (till now shot on film), except their diploma films, on video.

The institute would also hike the fees to Rs. 3 lakhs per year for each student. Students would be admitted under different grades, seats being kept reserved for aspirants being sponsored by corporate houses. FTII would also produce 2 commercial feature films with outside directors on which it would be mandatory for every final year student to assist. All these plans were to be aimed at helping the institute generate revenue.

Dr. Agashe has also talked about digitisation (introduction of contemporary technology) the final aim being the merger of the film and television wings.

4. IMMEDIATE PAST ON THE ISSUE

Dr. Agashe put forward his 'conceptual plans' informally to the GC held on 9 Nov 1997 knowing full well that any plans entailing academic restructuring must be put to the AC prior to the GC. Agashe requested the GC around 6 months time to work on his proposals.

The students brought to his notice that if an AC meeting was not convened to implement the Revised Syllabus FTII was heading for a zero semester. Agashe claimed that he could do nothing about the students' fears and would not admit a new batch of students till a new course structure was worked out.

The students also pointed out that his plans were not in consonance with the spirit of the institute, its aim being to produce trained professionals and not assistants. Students pointed out to him that his proposed fee hike would put FTII out of reach of everyone except a particular section of society.

Students also pointed out that the use of video throughout the course would not produce any competence on film, which is what the primary objective of FTII is.

The students impressed upon him that his plan of producing 2 commercial films as a source of income was completely unrealistic since there is no way in today's industry to predict the profitability of a film.

Perceiving that these proposals would replace the Revised Syllabus the students pressed for an AC meeting to implement the Revised Syllabus. At this juncture Agashe withdrew his 'conceptual proposals' from the agenda of the AC meeting. He also withdrew the question of a zero semester.

The students also met the faculty to estimate their stance on the issues of the Revised Syllabus and 'conceptual plans'. The faculty categorically stated that they were against a zero semester. The faculty were also of the view that since Dr. Agashe had not intimated the faculty of his 'conceptual proposals', the students were pre-empting the issue.

Before the AC meeting, Agashe met the faculty to discuss the forthcoming meeting and its agenda. The students learnt that Agashe had offered only two options to the faculty - either to opt for a zero semester or for a one year course suspending the regular course of the institute. The faculty chose the zero semester option.

To garner support from the ex-students who had assembled Pune for the convocation, meetings were held on 13 & 14 Dec '97. They were appraised on the status of the Revised Syllabus and about Agashe's 'conceptual proposals'. Ex-students also met Agashe and Mahesh Bhatt to express their apprehensions over the delay in implementing the Revised Syllabus and their anguish over the premier institute's desperate attempts to convert itself into a common-place polytechnic. Mahesh Bhatt offered his resignation and the students accepted it.

The students felt that the Revised Syllabus, which had been on the table for over a year now, must be implemented in the AC meeting of 17 Dec 97. It would further have to be approved by the GC so that a new prospectus for the coming batch maybe ready by Jan '98.

5. THE AC MEETING OF 17 DEC 97

The three member Consultative Committee consisting of 1 student from each year was barred from sitting on this meeting.

The faculty demanded more time to consider the "modalities" of implementing the Revised Syllabus. They demanded an initial 2 months to work out details of their own departments, 6 weeks of 'unhindered time' (they would also not work in the vacations) for co-ordinating inter-departmental excersises and then 2 weeks to sit with the Nodal Committee for final approval.

Dr. Agashe agreed to this demand. The decision of whether another batch should be taken in with the pre-96 syllabus or a zero semester be declared was postponed to the next AC meeting to be held on 31 Dec 97.

The Nodal Committee felt that the faculty's demand was unreasonable and that the modalities could be worked out in time to print the new prospectus in January 98. This would avoid a zero semester and once and for all resolve the issue of the Revised Syllabus. The Nodal Committee was barred from sitting on the AC meeting of 31 Dec 97.

The students perceive that the progression of events only implies that the director, Dr. Agashe and the faculty have no intention of ever implementing the Revised Syllabus inspite of all its merits. They also feel that if the Revised Syllabus is not implemented on 31 Dec 97 it will never see the light of day again. The students therefore have gone on an indefinite strike from 20 Dec 97. Their foremost demand is the full and final implementation of the Revised Syllabus for the coming batch to be admitted in July 1998.